3.8 AESTHETICS

3.8.1 Affected Environment

Two primary factors considered in this analysis of potential aesthetic impacts are viewing opportunities and distance from the site. Viewing opportunities relate to whether and for how long people can see the site. Factors that affect viewing opportunities are topography, vegetation, existing built structures, and travel speed. How the site is viewed is also affected by distance. In the foreground (0 to 0.5 miles), detail, color and scale are easily discerned. In the middle ground (0.5 to 3 miles), visual simplification occurs, details are less discernible and colors soften. Vegetation and built structures typically begin to interrupt views at this distance. Background views (more than 3 miles) are viewed as patterns of light and dark with little or no detail discernable.

In addition to the physical characteristics of the potentially affected views, the analysis must consider the regulatory context for aesthetic impacts. Therefore, the following material summarizes City of Seattle policies and regulations concerning protection of views and characterizes existing view conditions relevant to the proposed project.

3.8.1.1 City of Seattle View Policies and Regulations

Designated Viewpoints

Seattle has identified sites for the "public's enjoyment of views of mountains, water and skyline and has many scenic routes and other places where such views enhance one's experience" (Seattle SEPA Code 25.05). Public View Protection policies contained in Seattle's SEPA Code are intended to "protect public views of significant natural and human-made features: Mount Rainier, the Olympic and Cascade Mountains, the downtown skyline, and major bodies of water include Lake Washington, Lake Union and the Ship Canal, from public places consisting of specified viewpoints, parks, scenic routes, and view corridors identified in Attachment 1" to the SEPA Code.

Within the vicinity of the project site, the only designated viewpoint noted in Attachment 1 to the SEPA code is Sand Point Magnuson Park itself, identified as the Sand Point Park/Beach at Sand Point Way NE and NE 65th Street. No specific location within the park is noted in the City's SEPA policy with regard to public view protection. As shown in **Figures 3.8-1** through **3.8-7**, existing views vary from different locations within the park. In some cases, the primary view is of existing buildings, parking lots, fields and vegetation within the site. Extending beyond the project site, views to the west are of the View Ridge residential hillside rising above the site. Lake Washington is the predominant view to the east and is also visible to the north, beyond the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) facilities in some views. To the south, the primary view from NE 65th Street is of the USGS Western Fisheries Research facility, and the University of Washington multi-family housing. Much of the residential area to the south is screened from the site by mature vegetation.

Figure 3.8-1
Reference Map of Existing Views
(Figures 3.8-2 through 3.8-7)

Figure 3.8-2

Figure 3.8-3

Figure 3.8-4

Figure 3.8-5

Figure 3.8-6

Figure 3.8-7

While the City's SEPA code does not identify specific views or view locations within the park, DPR's Sand Point Magnuson Park Design Guidelines identify important views that are to be protected. In addition, the Seattle Department of Construction and Land Use (DCLU) recently developed an inventory of 86 city viewpoints protected under SEPA. Viewpoints identified in the inventory may eventually be subject to additional protective regulations, and the City will consider the information provided in the inventory in determining conditions for proposed future development. The DCLU (2002) study identifies two viewpoints in Sand Point Magnuson Park, both located east of Kite Hill near the Magnuson Beach area. These locations provide panoramic views along the shoreline of Lake Washington and to the Cascade Mountains and Mt. Rainier. Two other viewpoints included in the inventory, at Inverness Ravine and Matthews Beach Park, are within the general vicinity of Sand Point Magnuson Park but do not provide views to the project site.

Scenic Routes

City of Seattle ordinances (#97025 and #114057) identify specific scenic routes throughout the City along which view protection is to be encouraged. The two streets designated as scenic routes in the vicinity of the project site are Sand Point Way NE (extending along and north/south of the park) and NE 65th Street between 50th Avenue NE and Sand Point Way NE.

Views along Sand Point Way NE are of a mix of commercial, office and multi-family residential development and mature vegetation. The Sand Point Magnuson Park entrance at NE 65th Street provides a view into the site that is heavily screened by existing trees (see **Figure 3.8.7**). Existing features at the NE 65th Street entrance include the former Hobby Shop, currently boarded up for protection, and a sidewalk that extends east into the park. Views of the proposed project area cannot be easily discerned from the NE 65th Street entrance. Mature vegetation blocks views into the project site from vehicles or pedestrians passing by on Sand Point Way.

At most other locations along Sand Point Way between NE 65th Street and NE 80th Street, the former naval air station buildings that are generally parallel to Sand Point Way NE block views into the park. The most prominent of these buildings is Building 9, which extends over 800 feet in length. However, eastern views into Sand Point Magnuson Park can be seen through the check-station at the NE 74th Street Entrance. From this entrance, the formal naval station buildings, streets, surface parking, and distant views of the park's natural areas can be seen.

East-facing views down NE 65th Street between 50th Avenue NE and Sand Point Way NE are primarily of Lake Washington and mature vegetation within the surrounding residential neighborhood (see **Figures 3.8-8** and **3.8-9**). Intermittent partial views of the project site are present in some locations, but are limited by existing vegetation and residential development.

Figure 3.8-8

Figure 3.8-9

Private Views

The City SEPA code notes that "(a)dopted Land Use Codes attempt to protect private views through height and bulk controls and other zoning regulations but it is impractical to protect private views through project-specific review." The issue of private view protection has been considered by the City many times; to date, however, the City has not adopted any specific policy or regulatory action directing that private views be protected. The Seattle Parks Tree Policy prescribes that no trees on city park property are to be trimmed or removed for the sole benefit of private view improvement.

3.8.1.2 Views to the Site

The View Ridge neighborhood west of the project site rises in elevation from Sand Point Way NE to the crest of the hill at approximately 50th Avenue NE. In general, views from the west toward the project site include mature vegetation in the neighborhood and along Sand Point Way NE in the foreground while Lake Washington, residential and commercial development along the east side of the lake, and the Cascade Mountains are seen in the distance. Features within Sand Point Magnuson Park are partially visible in the mid-range at some locations within the View Ridge neighborhood, including various points along NE 75th, NE 70th and NE 65th Streets. Prominent views of the site are found at NE 70th Street/50th Avenue NE, NE 70th Street/56th Avenue NE, and NE 75th Street/55th Avenue NE (see **Figures 3.8-10** through **3.8-12**). Sand Point Magnuson Park features that can be seen from these views include open fields and mature vegetation and the former Navy Commissary building. Distant views of Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains can be seen beyond the park. The project site is generally not visible from other public rights-of-way in the site vicinity, generally because buildings or vegetation on residential lots block the views.

Public facilities in the View Ridge neighborhood include Bryant Park, the View Ridge Playground, and View Ridge Elementary School. None of these facilities have views of the project site. The Burke Gilman Trail is a regional non-motorized trail that runs west of and roughly parallel to Sand Point Way NE in the vicinity of the site. Due to existing development between Sand Point Way NE and the Burke Gilman Trail, the project site is generally not visible from the trail; at selected locations where the trail crosses public rights-of-way, where there are brief views of existing structures adjacent to Sand Point Way NE.

Views to the site from the south are shown in **Figures 3.8-13** and **3.8-14**. Intermittent views of features within Sand Point Magnuson Park are available from NE 60th and NE 61st Streets, between 60th Avenue NE and 65th Avenue NE. Sand Point Magnuson Park features that can be seen from southern viewpoints primarily include mature evergreen trees and vegetation and some open areas along the waterfront. The best viewing access to the park in this area is along NE 61st Street, where a portion of the park is visible beyond the University of Washington multi-family residences, some of which are currently under construction. The Commissary can also be seen intermittently between trees from this area. When construction of the University of Washington resident complexes is complete, the new structures may block some views into Sand Point Magnuson Park from the south. Beyond the park, distant northeastern views of the shores of Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains can also be seen from these areas.

Figure 3.8-10

Figure 3.8-11

Figure 3.8-12

Figure 3.8-13

Figure 3.8-14

Unobstructed views of Sand Point Magnuson Park are available from the surface of Lake Washington, which surrounds the park to the north, east and southeast of the site. Features in the park that are visible vary with location relative to the site. From the north, for example, the large buildings in the NOAA complex are prominent and help to obscure park features located farther to the south.

Views of Sand Point Magnuson Park from the east can also be seen from downtown Kirkland, approximately 3 miles distant (see **Figure 3.8–15**). The Commissary, located at the southern end of the park, a large expanse of open park space around Kite Hill, and the white-colored NOAA facilities can easily be discerned from Marina Park in downtown Kirkland. Beyond the park, residential neighborhoods surrounding the park and the Olympic Mountain range can be seen from this vantage point. Residential light sources are also be evident from this and other locations on the eastern shore of Lake Washington.

Figure 3.8-15
View to West of Sand Point Magnuson Park from Marina Park, Kirkland

3.8.1.3 Views from the Site

Views from the project site are described in **Section 3.8.1.1** and shown in **Figures 3.8-1** through **3.8-7**. Views vary from different locations within the site. In general, the primary foreground view is of existing buildings, parking lots, fields and vegetation within the site. Extending beyond the site, mid-range views are of the View Ridge neighborhood, Lake Washington, and mature vegetation in the surrounding area. Distant views are of Kirkland, Finn Hill and Kenmore east and north of Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains.

3.8.2 Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

The following discussion focuses on the anticipated impacts of the project upon existing views in and near the project site during daylight hours. The visual effects of the project on these same views at night would be dominated by the lighting elements of the proposal, which are addressed in detail in **Section 3.9 Light and Glare**.

3.8.2.1 Designated Viewpoints

As described above, the Sand Point Park/Beach (Magnuson Park) is identified in the City of Seattle SEPA code as a designated viewpoint. Foreground views throughout much of Sand Point Magnuson Park would change as a result of the proposal. Views of the western portion of the project site would be of developed parking areas, sports fields and pedestrian pathways. The lighting systems around the sports fields, which would involve a total of 80 light poles with an average of 8 luminaires on each pole and each 65 to 85 feet in height, would be prominent in the foreground views. Buildings in the background would also be seen in the context of these light poles; the light poles would be significant new features of the built environment. (Please refer to **Section 3.9 Light and Glare** for a discussion specific to potential light and glare impacts.) In the southern portion of the park and project site, foreground views of existing structures (primarily the former Navy Commissary) would be replaced by created wetlands, sports fields and parking areas. Foreground views in the central portion of the park would primarily be of natural wetland areas, walking trails and shoreline areas.

Views from the two specific locations identified in the DCLU (2002) inventory of viewpoints protected under SEPA would not likely be significantly affected by the proposed action. The view orientation at these locations (at/near Magnuson Beach, as shown in View "E", **Figure 3.8-6**) spans a viewing angle from due north around to the south-southwest and is focused on lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains beyond. Westerly views toward the interior of the park are currently screened by existing upland vegetation that would generally remain undisturbed with the proposed action. It is conceivable that a few of the sports field light poles would be visible above the vegetation but, if so, they would be viewed against a backdrop of vegetation and housing rising beyond the sports field complex. The amount of screening would increase over time as the vegetation matured.

Figure 3.8-16 is a simulation of the anticipated future view from the western portion of the wetland/habitat complex, based on a photo taken from the existing sports meadow parking lot. The simulation indicates that, at least during the initial period of operation of the project, park visitors in this area would have partially screened views of field light systems within the sports field complex. In general, the luminaire assemblies and the top half to three-quarters of the light poles would be visible above the existing vegetation. The light systems would be viewed against a background of vegetation and residential development on the hillside to the west and south of the park, which would reduce the degree of visual contrast introduced by the sports field facilities. Over time, existing vegetation that would remain and native trees and shrubs planted to support habitat development (little of which is portrayed in the simulation) would grow and provide additional screening of the light systems and the urban development in the background.

Figure 3.8-16
Simulation of On-Site View from Wetland/Habitat Complex with Proposed Action

The location of the simulated view in **Figure 3.8-16** is approximately 600-700 feet from the eastern edge of the proposed sports field complex, and is generally representative of potential future views from the marshy pool and wet meadow areas in the western part of the wetland/habitat complex. Other locations within the wetland/habitat complex would be located at distances of up to about 2,000 feet from the sports field complex. Much of the remaining area of the wetland/habitat complex, including the Promontory Ponds, Lagoon, Beach Drive Ponds and central habitat reserve areas, would have substantial cover of upland forest vegetation. Consequently, throughout much of the wetland/habitat complex views of the sports field facilities would be entirely blocked by vegetation, or would be sufficiently screened and seen at such a distance that the light systems would be indistinct. This condition would apply to views toward the west from the shoreline area of the park.

Figure 3.8-17 is a simulation of the anticipated future view from approximately the northern entrance of the realigned Sportsfield Drive, looking south. This view intentionally does not include much of the landscaping vegetation that would be planted with the proposed action, so as not to obscure the athletic field improvements modeled in the simulation. Landscape plantings would ultimately provide much greater screening and softening of the view than is shown in this rendering. Nevertheless, **Figure 3.8-17** accurately indicates that the constructed sports field facilities would be prominent visual elements of the scene throughout much of the western portion of the project site. Depending on the viewer's location, some luminaire assemblies would stand out against the skyline while others would be seen with trees in the background and/or foreground. Sports field fencing and backstops would be evident, but would not be massive or dominate the view.

3.8.2.2 Scenic Routes

Designated scenic routes in the vicinity of the site include Sand Point Way NE and NE 65th Street (between 50th Avenue NE and Sand Point Way NE). The proposed action would have minimal adverse effect on the existing limited views of Sand Point Magnuson Park along Sand Point Way NE. At the NE 65th Street entrance to the park, Building 15 (the Hobby Shop) would be demolished, the right-of-way would be realigned and landscaping would be added along the entrance road. The visual character of this location would change with the new park entrance boulevard and associated landscaping.

Because views of Sand Point Magnuson Park from NE 65th Street are limited, no significant visual impacts from the proposal are anticipated in this location. To the extent that the project site is visible, the enhanced landscaping along the proposed park entrance boulevard would likely be the most visible feature.

3.8.2.3 Views to the Site

Views of Sand Point Magnuson Park from the View Ridge neighborhood to the west could be affected by the proposed action, depending on the location of the viewing site and the degree of existing view obstruction. Locations with the most unobstructed views, including various points along NE 70th and NE 75th Streets, would likely experience the greatest change. Changes could include partial views of new sports fields and light poles (please refer to **Section 3.9 Light and Glare** for a discussion of potential light and glare impacts on nighttime views) in the western half of the project site, and enhanced natural areas in the eastern half of the site.

Figure 3.8-17
Simulation of On-Site View from Sportsfield Drive Entry with Proposed Action

Three simulations have been prepared to help assess the effects of the proposed action on views to the site. **Figure 3.8-18** is a simulation of the anticipated future view with the proposed action from NE 75th Street at 55th Avenue NE, looking east. **Figure 3.8-19** is a simulation of the anticipated future view from NE 70th Street at 50th Avenue NE, looking east. **Figure 3.8-20** is a simulation of the anticipated future view from NE 61st Street at approximately 64th Avenue NE, looking north.

Figures 3.8-18 and **3.8-19** are indicative of the range of likely future views of the project from residential areas on the hillside to the west of Sand Point Way NE. Some locations, particularly those at higher elevations that have clear viewing corridors that are not blocked by structures or vegetation, would have views of the project site similar to that portrayed in **Figure 3.8-18**. (**Figure 3.8-18** is based on essentially the same view shown previously in **Figure 3.8-12**; please note that part of a tree trunk in the foreground has been digitally removed in the simulation to reveal additional area of sports field features.) In this example, sports field features seen at a distance of roughly ½-mile would be noticeable in the middle ground of the view, with varying degrees of view blockage by structures and vegetation lower on the hillside (the degree of view blockage would vary considerably from site to site on the hillside). The expanse of the sports field surfaces would probably be the most distinct element visible, although viewers at this distance would also be able to discern fencing, backstops, parking lots and light systems. These sports field features would not be out of context in an urban park setting, and would be one of several distinct visual elements (along with other expansive areas of the park, surrounding development, Lake Washington, urban development on the east side of the lake, and the Cascade Mountains) present in this panoramic view. **Figure 3.8-18** is probably representative of View Ridge locations with the maximum visual exposure to the project site and the greatest visibility of sports field features.

Figure 3.8-19 (which corresponds to the existing view shown previously in **Figure 3.8-10**) represents a simulated view from a location approximately 5 blocks to the south and east from the location shown in **Figure 3.8-18**. In this case, only intermittent views of sports field features are possible because of intervening vegetation (primarily) and structures. The simulation shows discontinuous patches of sports field surfaces, fencing/backstops, parking lot surfaces and light systems intermingled among the hillside landscaping and open patches and trees within the park. The sports field light poles and assemblies create narrow, vertical visual elements that are similar to the street lights in the foreground. Overall, the degree of visual contrast created by the sports fields in this view is relatively minor. This visual condition would likely be applicable to sizable portions of the View Ridge neighborhood to the west of the project site, particularly areas lower on the hillside and south of approximately NE 70th Street.

As discussed in **Section 3.8.1.3**, intermittent views toward the project site are possible from some areas in the residential neighborhood to the south of the project site. **Figure 3.8-20** simulates the anticipated future view to the north from NE 61st Street near 64th Avenue NE, within the Radford Court housing complex. In this case sports field features occupy a rather narrow slice of the center middle ground view; they are framed by existing trees, rooftops within the housing complex, existing buildings within the community campus area of Sand Point Magnuson Park, and buildings in the NOAA complex beyond the park. The light poles shown in this view extend to about the same viewing height as the tops of existing trees, and are not distinct when viewed against light-colored buildings. Based on the limited extent of sports field features evident and the degree of visual contrast introduced by other, existing elements in this view, the sports fields would not be prominent features in views such as this. Existing trees and structures block or screen views toward the project site from many areas in the neighborhood to the south,

Figure 3.8-18
Simulated View from NE 75th Street/55th Avenue NE with Proposed Action

Figure 3.8-19
Simulated View from NE 70th Street/50th Avenue NE with Proposed Action

Figure 3.8-20
Simulated View from NE 61st Street/64th Avenue NE with Proposed Action

so project facilities would not be evident in such locations. Conversely, the units in the northeastern corner of the Radford Court complex would have clear views directly across NE 65th Street toward the sports field complex.

Views from nearby locations (such as near NE 75th Street/55th Avenue NE on View Ridge) of the existing structures associated with and including the former Navy retail complex (Building 193 – the Commissary) would be changed with demolition of these structures (see **Figure 3.8-12**). Under the proposal, the Commissary and surrounding buildings would be replaced by less prominent but more expansive patterns of sports fields, parking lots and light poles. These views would likely be most apparent at the crest of the hill (near 50th Avenue NE) and less visible as the viewer moves down the hill toward Sand Point Way NE.

Because the project site is not visible from the Burke Gilman Trail or other public facilities in the vicinity, the proposed action would have no effect on views from these locations.

From the neighborhood to the south of the park, the proposed action could modify views at various points along NE 60th and NE 61st Streets to include the new sports fields, parking lots, light poles and enhanced wetland areas. Existing views of the former retail complex (Building 193) would be replaced with wetland habitat, parking lots and sports fields. However, as indicated in **Figures 3.8-13** and **3.8-14**, most views to the site from the south are pretty well screened. Most views of the project site from the south would likely show fragments of the proposed project facilities, as shown in **Figure 3.8-20**.

Modified daytime views of features resulting from the proposed action would be most apparent from Lake Washington to the east. From the east, the entire Sand Point Magnuson Park facility can be seen without obstruction. These views would change in both positive and negative ways. With the removal of the light-colored Commissary, this structure would no longer be a prominent feature on the western shore of Lake Washington. Removal of this large structure would increase the natural-appearing character of the park in views from the lake. Under the proposed action, discernable park features that would be introduced into the western portion of the project site and seen from the water would primarily include vegetated areas and partially-screened views of parked cars in surface lots, some of the sports field light structures, and fenced areas within the sports fields.

Southern and northern views from Lake Washington to the site would differ somewhat than those from the east. From the north and northeast, views of the park would not likely change. Kite Hill would continue to be the most prominent feature seen from this vantage point. This feature blocks views of the southern portions of the Sand Point Magnuson Park site from the north. Similarly, views of the park from the south on Lake Washington are not anticipated to change significantly. From the south, the more-natural areas in the eastern portion of the park (on the outer part of the peninsula) are most readily seen. Other features, such as the Commissary and the location of the sports field complex, are set back considerably from the shore, so project-caused changes in these locations would not be as easily seen directly from the south.

Under the proposal, park features seen from distant views to the site from the east side of Lake Washington would be somewhat similar to those features seen from the water, although features would be less discernable due to the distance. In general, the NOAA facilities, open spaces, and the Commissary features of Sand Point Magnuson Park can currently be seen from the eastern shores of Lake Washington.

Therefore, the removal of the Commissary would change the park's appearance from this distant view. However, the impact of this change is not significant due to the distance (Please refer to **Section 3.9** for a discussion of potential light and glare impacts from this location.)

3.8.3 Impacts of the Alternatives

3.8.3.1 Lesser-Capacity Alternative

In general, potential aesthetic impacts from the lesser-capacity alternative would be similar in nature and extent to those described in Section 3.8.2.1 for the proposed action. Because this alternative would have considerably fewer lighted sports fields, potential impacts associated with light poles (21 light poles, rather than 80) and lighting would be correspondingly less than under the proposed action. Viewers within the western portion of the wetland/habitat complex, for example, would see at most a fraction of the light systems shown in **Figure 3.8-16**. In more distant views (such as shown in **Figure 3.8-18**) fewer light systems would be visible, but field surfaces, fencing and parking areas would still be evident. Conversely, visitors to the interior of the park would see more evidence of development within the wetland/habitat area (as they do in the existing condition), because the interior roadway, tennis courts and parking lot would be retained in the lesser-capacity alternative.

3.8.3.2 No Action

Because no or minimal new construction would occur with the no action alternative, no changes in views of the site would result from development of sports fields and wetland/habitat areas. At some point in the future, views to the site would no longer include the former Navy Commissary as a prominent feature. Maturing of vegetation within the park could result in minor modification over time of some views from the project site, or some views across the site from neighboring areas.

3.8.4 Cumulative Impacts

None of the alternatives are expected to result in cumulative aesthetic impacts on the project site or in the vicinity. Other current and planned projects in Sand Point Magnuson Park generally involve redevelopment of existing structures, and would not result in a significant change to the extent of constructed features evident in views of the park. Proposed major projects or development trends that would significantly change the aesthetic character of the surrounding community have not been identified.

3.8.5 Mitigation Measures

Potential mitigation measures to reduce the aesthetic effects of the proposed action include the following:

- Design proposed facilities to maintain view corridors along the western edge of the proposed surface parking and sports fields.
- Consider lighting management criteria, landscape buffers, low-sodium lighting, full cut-off lighting fixtures for parking lots, and low hanging street lamps to minimize light impacts in the transition areas between the sports fields and the Sand Point Historic District to the west and the adjacent residential neighborhoods to the south.

- Use recessive colors on light poles, sports field fencing and related structures.
- Provide landscape screening around surface parking lots and sports fields to minimize visibility of cars and light poles from views on site and from surrounding locations.
- Provide landscape screening of views toward sports fields from viewing platforms and other key viewing locations in the wetland/habitat complex.

3.8.6 Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The Commissary would no longer be a prominent feature in many views on or to the Sand Point Magnuson Park site. Instead, daytime views of natural vegetation, wetlands, and features associated with sports fields in the park would increase from some surrounding viewpoints and from within the park itself. Sports field light poles and luminaires would be notable new features visible from within the park looking west and in some views from the west to the park.

The Sand Point Magnuson Park design standards, guidelines, and the mitigation measures described above, together with the City's development regulations, are adequate to mitigate the significant adverse visual impacts anticipated for the proposed action and lesser-capacity alternative.